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Viewing cable 08BUENOSAIRE691, ARGENTINA: SPACE LAUNCH VEHICLE UPDATE

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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#08BUENOSAIRE691.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BUENOSAIRE691	2008-05-21 15:10	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Buenos Aires

Appears in these articles:

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: SPACE LAUNCH VEHICLE UPDATE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR E. ANTHONY WAYNE, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 10.

Summary

¶2. (C) The head of Argentina's space agency is confident that the GOA will eventually agree to our request for greater transparency in Argentina's space launch vehicle (SLV) program. However, that will be a decision taken at the highest political levels, and will likely be subject to an evaluation of the intrusiveness of the measures we propose. We also suspect that the GOA will ask that the USG formally release Argentina from its 1992 assurances not to develop an SLV before agreeing to make its program fully transparent to the U.S. End Summary.

Transparency Requested

¶3. (C) The Embassy delivered reftel points May 16 requesting that Argentina provide the U.S. with full transparency into the Argentine space launch vehicle (SLV) program. Dr. Conrado Varotto, head of Argentine space agency CONAE, and Ambassador Elsa Kelly of the MFA's Directorate of International Security, Space, and Nuclear Issues received the demarche. Emboff followed up with a May 19 meeting with Dr. Varotto, and we plan to meet with Ambassador Kelly next week (she is currently traveling).

CONAE's Informal Reaction

¶4. (C) Dr. Varotto told Emboff May 19 that his government still "needs to take a very careful look" at our points, but his initial reaction is that, from CONAE's technical perspective, Argentina could agree to everything. The problem, Varotto continued, is that this issue has risen to the political level, and it is therefore difficult to predict how things will be decided. Varotto pointed to our request for annual consultations as key to the GOA's decision-making process. Specifically, if such consultations are to consist of Varotto sending a progress report once a year to the U.S. Ambassador and inviting Embassy officials to witness program milestones, such as rocket launches, then Varotto believes the GOA will have no problems in acquiescing to our request. If, however, our idea of consultations is to send teams of U.S. experts to Argentina in what would likely be high-profile visits, then that might be more difficult to sell.

¶5. (C) Varotto said that his aim is to somehow bring the issue back to a working/experts level, and he will best be able to manage that if whatever we work out does not appear to involve anything particularly intrusive. Both Varotto and CONAE General Secretary Felix Menicocci expressed optimism about the chances that this issue will soon find an amicable resolution. Putting that feeling into words on the way to the elevator after the meeting, Menicocci held up reftel points and said: "This is not a bad paper."

Gestures of Goodwill

¶6. (C) Varotto insisted that the GOA has given every indication possible that it is serious about keeping the SLV program transparent. For example, the GOA, as it has in the past, invited the Embassy's ESTH counselor to witness a scheduled May 15 launch of its Tronador 1 rocket (reftel). The Embassy's DAO office provided transportation to the launch site, which was located within the grounds of the Puerto Belgrano Navy Base (located at 61 55 59 W - 38 56 00 S), but the anticipated launch was aborted twice that day, and no Embassy official was present when it

successfully lifted off May 16. Still, ESTH counselor was afforded every consideration, given unfettered access to the rocket itself and to all persons involved in the launch, and was allowed to take photographs of the rocket from all angles.

¶7. (C) Embassy DAO officials had been denied access to the same event, however, a circumstance that Emboff told Varotto called into question GOA assurances of complete transparency. Varotto countered by saying that military officials had been deliberately excluded to avoid the possibility that anyone (read: the U.S.) might imagine there to be a military component to the SLV program. He stressed that the GOA made a conscious decision to invite only scientific counselors from interested embassies (Brazil, France, Italy, and the U.S.). Emboff then asked why, if that was such a concern, the GOA chose to use the grounds of a military base for the launch site. Varotto explained that CONAE had contracted with the Argentine Navy for logistical support for the launch. The base was the only place in Argentina remote enough for the purposes of the launch that possessed the requisite manpower and firefighting capabilities and also had sleeping quarters for the CONAE team. (Note: It was ESTH counselor's impression that the members of the Argentine armed forces present at the launch site were there only in a support capacity. CONAE scientists were making all the decisions. At the same time, Elsa Kelly admitted to DCM that the decision to hold the launch on a military launch was likely to give rise to questions outside of Argentina about the real nature of the program, though she insisted, like Varotto, that resources and logistics were the sole reasons for that decision.)

¶8. (C) As further evidence of Argentina's openness, Varotto pointed to the GOA's May 19 formal declaration to the International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation. That declaration explained the context of the launch, gave the location of the launch site, and otherwise complied with the notification provisions of the Code.

¶9. (C) Varotto also said that he would be happy to brief MTCR partners at the annual plenary, but he had questions about the possible utility of such a briefing. That is, Varotto noted that there was an almost complete overlap between signatories of the MTCR and of the International Code of Conduct, which Argentina had just advised of the test. An exception is Brazil, but Varotto and Menicocci said Brazil is well aware of the Argentine SLV program.

Action Request

¶10. (C) We request further details concerning how the Department envisions the "annual consultations" we are requesting, and how the U.S. proposes to conduct the site visits. As Varotto explained, those details will be key factors in the GOA's eventual response to our request.

Comment

¶11. (C) Despite Varotto's optimism regarding the chances of quickly putting this issue behind us, we suspect that he and his nominal supervisors at the MFA will ask for something in exchange for formalizing Varotto's frequent offers of providing the U.S. with full transparency into Argentina's SLV program. Specifically, Varotto hinted that the GOA will suggest the following quid pro quo: the GOA will agree to full transparency, with yearly bilateral consultations (whatever form those eventually take), in exchange for the U.S. agreeing that enough time has passed to render obsolete and therefore invalid the 1992 assurances that Argentina would not develop an SLV program for the "foreseeable future."

WAYNE